

The Art and Design Schools

Arts and design-based schools make sense for students, for Oregon, and for the Initiative

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative believes arts and design schools provide unique opportunities for student learning. To that end, Initiative staff conducted a review of the literature on arts and design schools, as well as visited several effective arts and design schools. This paper summarizes our findings.

This strategic focus of “arts and design” makes sense for several reasons, including:

- **SOLID RESEARCH BASE:** An impressive body of academic research and existing school models demonstrate that the arts have a profound impact on student achievement and closing the achievement gap.
- **UNIQUE CURRICULUM:** Arts-themed schools provide educators with unique and powerful ways to engage students in learning that is rigorous and relevant.
- **PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND WORK IN OREGON:** The art and design theme provides an effective means of preparing students for college, work, and citizenship in Oregon.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE ARTS & DESIGN SCHOOL CADRE

What does a small school with an “arts and design” theme look like? As is the case in other theme-based schools, the art and design focus will provide an organizing theme that gives cohesion and purpose to the academic program. In the words of R. Craig Sautter of De Paul University, “An arts-integrated school follows the lead of magnet schools by giving students enough time to sample many art forms and to learn at least one of them well. But it goes even further by using the arts as a means to connect all areas of the curriculum and to make the learning experience a coherent one that makes more sense to students.”

These innovative new schools will share a common core of rigorous instructional strategies that engage students in powerful analysis, understanding, synthesis, and interpretation of core academic concepts. All art and design work is about ideas and the communication and interpretation of those ideas. These schools will be deeply rooted in pedagogy of inquiry and understanding: students will investigate concepts and create products and performances that demonstrate their understanding of those concepts. In addition, students will develop career and life planning skills and apply them to their postsecondary next steps.

The instructional program will center around three key components:

- **CORE ACADEMICS:** While course offerings and areas of emphasis will differ from school to school, all campuses will feature a rigorous college-preparatory coursework including mathematics, science, social science, humanities, and world languages.
- **ADVANCED INSTRUCTION IN ARTS AND DESIGN:** Advanced instruction will be offered in areas such as communications, design, the visual arts (including drawing and painting, sculpture, video and digital arts applications), music, dance, and theatre.
- **INDUSTRY CONNECTIONS:** Beyond these technical production skills students will also experience “all aspects of the industry”, including entrepreneurship, management, planning, finance, technology, and labor and community issues.

While some students may choose to pursue careers in the arts, the primary intent of these schools will not be to train professional artists, but to produce thoughtful human beings who know how to think, learn, communicate, and solve problems.

II. RESEARCH SUPPORTS THE ARTS & DESIGN APPROACH

THE ARTS IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

An impressive body of research – from academia as well as from arts practitioners – shows that the arts have a remarkable impact on student achievement.

- Dr. Shirley Brice Heath, a professor of linguistics and English at Stanford University, says that “The influences of participation in the arts on language show up in the dramatic increase in syntactic complexity, hypothetical reasoning, and questioning approaches taken up by young people within four to six weeks of their entry into the arts organization.”
- According to UCLA’s Dr. James Catterall, “Students who report consistent high levels of involvement in instrumental music over the middle and high school years show significantly higher levels of mathematics proficiency by grade 12.”
- Beyond the critical skills of reading and math, studies show that arts-integrated schools can benefit subject-specific instruction in reading, writing, social science, math, and science by applying higher-order thinking skills, utilizing multiple intelligences, adjusting attitudes toward learning, and addressing connections and relevance.

These arts-related gains are borne out in standardized test scores.

- The College Board has concluded that students with just half a year of arts coursework averaged a 7 point gain on the verbal portion of the SAT and a 10-point gain in math, and after 4 years students averaged 49 points higher on the combined score.
- Students who took more than four years of music and arts scored 34 points higher on the verbal section and 18 points higher on the math section of the SAT than students who studied music for a year or less.

THE ARTS ADDRESS THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Perhaps most importantly, achievement gains from the arts are seen across the board for students from all backgrounds.

- Jerrold Ross, Director of the National Arts Education Research Center, writes that research shows “The arts have a significant impact on academic achievement...in a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural), with a variety of population groups (ranging from the barrio of Los Angeles to the upper echelon of suburban New Jersey).”
- A 1996 study found that after-school and summer arts programs had “a measurable impact on youth at risk in deterring delinquent behavior and truancy problems while also increasing overall academic performance...” (YouthARTS Development Project)
- The arts provide a stimulating, hands-on, experiential, activity-enriched learning environment that has proven effective for students with Attention Defecit Disorder (ADD) and other learning disabilities.
- Involvement in the arts provides attention to social and developmental needs of young people through success, growth in self-esteem, and self-confidence. The arts help to reclaim students from homes and neighborhoods torn by poverty.

The ability of the arts to address the needs of all learners and significantly reduce the achievement gap is not surprising. The arts have long appealed to students of all types because they create a setting where all students have something to contribute. Quality arts instruction takes all students from where they are and leads them through a process of inquiry and development that results in powerful learning and production. And since the arts are inherently inclusive, teachers don't need to reframe their pedagogical approach to address issues of equity. In this way, the arts are uniquely positioned to, as Catterall argues, "help level the educational playing field for disadvantaged students."

PRACTICIONERS VALIDATE THE ARTS APPROACH

Adding to the chorus of research support are the voices of educators from quality arts schools across the nation. While these schools vary in size, program, and student population, they all succeed at engaging students and producing high academic outcomes for all of their students by infusing arts across the curriculum. Not surprisingly, art-based programs (along with other hands-on courses) are often singled out by high schools in our state as models of exemplary instruction.

Exemplary arts-themed high schools include:

- ❑ Arts and Communication Magnet Academy (Beaverton, OR, www.beavton.k12.or.us/acma/)
- ❑ Boston Arts Academy (Boston, MA, www.boston-arts-academy.org/)
- ❑ Tacoma School of the Arts (Tacoma, WA, www.tacoma.k12.wa.us/schools/hs/sota/)
- ❑ Vancouver School of Arts and Academics (Vancouver, WA, www.vansd.org/vocweb/mfact/arts.html)

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE A NATIONAL MODEL

It is important to note that while several individual arts schools can be found across the nation, few, if any "models" exist for art and design-based small high schools. This dearth of models provides an excellent opportunity for the Oregon Small Schools Initiative to contribute to the national small schools movement. By creating a cadre of these themed schools, the Initiative could focus on the design and implementation factors that are essential for creating high achieving and equitable art and design schools, and thus add to the learning of school reformers across the nation.

III. UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE ARTS & DESIGN CURRICULUM

A CURRICULUM THAT ENGAGES STUDENTS

The arts have long been recognized as an effective tool to engage students and teach them important skills and habits of mind that are essential for other areas of academic and personal life. The arts engage students for a number of reasons:

- The arts provide unlimited opportunities to tap into student interests, thus building a sense of relevance, improving attitudes toward learning, and leading to higher achievement.
- The arts tap into creative thinking and personal expression. Student voice and choice are honored in the artistic process, providing an avenue for personal expression and "personal signature." Indeed, it is the combination of content, skills, and voice that together form the real magic of the arts: craftsmanship and signature. Students from across the ability spectrum use the visual and performing arts as a powerful tool for self expression and creativity.
- According to Sautter, "In the traditional situation, students are spectators; in the arts-integrated school students are constantly required to use their creative minds.... Twenty-five years of experience demonstrate that involvement in the arts helps unlock the curiosity, energy, and imagination of young people and teachers...."
- Arts address both the right and left brain and appeal to multiple intelligences and learning styles.

A CURRICULUM THAT PROMOTES ACADEMIC RIGOR AND RELEVANCE

By their very nature, the arts are well positioned to engage students in rigorous academic work. Several factors contribute to the challenging nature of arts instruction:

- Artists naturally use a “learning cycle” in their craft, a process which attends to reflection, planning, rehearsal, production, formative assessment, and performance. This cycle trains students in the “habits of mind” such as persistence, craftsmanship, and metacognition – essential thinking behaviors that are the key to success in school and in life. In this way, the artistic learning process delivers both rigor and relevance.
- The arts are unique as a rigorous instructional paradigm because they demand that students “go public” with their learning through exhibitions, demonstrations, and performances – and they support kids to achieve these high levels. It takes deep content knowledge and high-level literacy skills to interpret material, produce professional work, and respond to critique from instructors and audience members. Steve Seidel at Harvard University notes that “learning is deepest when learners have the capacity to represent what they have learned, and the multiple disciplines of the arts all provide modes of representation.”
- Students who enter school with skill deficiencies are coached through multiple forms of challenging reading and writing as they interact with and create scripts, plans, web text, and other forms of media. For teachers, an arts-based curriculum will encourage a variety of effective and equitable teaching strategies designed to meet the needs of individual learners and to emphasize depth and rigor over breadth and “coverage.”
- The arts and design also provide natural platforms for curricular integration because artistic genres tend to be both collaborative and cross-disciplinary, allowing teachers to consistently integrate across subjects through a careful mapping of curricular standards. In this way, the arts act as a synthesis tool, pushing students toward higher levels of rigorous critical thinking and relevant connections across the curriculum.

A CURRICULUM THAT FOSTERS SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The relational connections provided through the arts also make a powerful case for small art and design-based schools. In these smaller settings, students will be supported to take creative risks through the bonds forged with their teachers, peers, and community partners.

- Student-teacher relationships flourish amidst the dynamic of artistic instruction and production. Through the context of the arts and design, teachers and students experience growing levels of respect, trust, flexibility, and a shared vision for quality performance.
- Practice is required in all genres, and this intense repetition demands deep relationships between students and their instructors. Arts teachers are perfectly positioned to be “warm demanders” providing both personalized support and high academic expectations.
- Students at arts schools benefit from connections with artists, designers, employers, and other members of their broader communities. Formal linkages will be fostered through internships, artistic residencies, partnerships with parents and community arts organizations, and a variety of workplace learning opportunities.
- Student peer relationships also thrive within arts programs. With many opportunities for small group and ensemble work in theatre, orchestra, choir, and peer critique in all genres, students develop teaming and interpersonal communication skills that serve them well in a variety of school and work settings. These bonds also foster a peer culture that values academic achievement and success in the classroom.

THE ARTS TEACH ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

In addition to promoting core academic concepts and skills, the arts enable educators to address broader issues that are needed for life and citizenship.

- The arts promote the social behavior to improve self-discipline, self-motivation, self-esteem, and social interaction. Art students develop the kind of self-discipline, responsibility, curiosity, and work ethic that most employers crave. They also provide an avenue through which students can explore values and interest while they engage in career and life planning.
- Arts-integrated schools empower students with multiple perspectives and languages with which to think and act. Creative and critical thinking and problem-solving skills are greatly needed in the work force.
- Arts education builds social tolerance, understanding, empathy, and perspective, and provides avenues for positive interaction with the broader community.

IV. AN APPROACH THAT WORKS FOR OREGON

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND LIFE

The primary goal of the arts and design cadre schools will be to give students rigorous academic preparation for college and life. While some students may ultimately decide to pursue careers in the arts, specialized artistic training is not the primary goal of these schools. However, in a world that increasingly relies on design and creativity as a basis for success in nearly every profession, art is no longer a considered an academic “extra” or elective. In fact, arts instruction is increasingly recognized across the state and nation as an essential component of a thinking-centered curriculum. For example:

- Education technology expert Dr. Jason Ohler noted in *Education Leadership* (2000) that “The convergence of these two developments [multimedia technology and the Internet] has earned art a permanent place in the common experience of life for us all. For that reason, art should be included in the common experience of school for all students, not just those who plan to major in art and design. Those who do not create art for a living will use it, manage it, interpret it, or interact within ways that simply did not exist 10 years ago.”
- The necessity of arts instruction has been recognized through the inclusion of the arts as a core academic subject in the Federal “No Child Left Behind” legislation as well as in Oregon’s proficiency-based graduation standards (the “Certificate of Initial Mastery” and “Certificate of Advanced Mastery”).
- Richard Riley, former Secretary of the US Department of Education suggest that “If young Americans are to succeed and to contribute to what Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan describes as our ‘economy of ideas,’ they will need an education that develops imaginative, flexible and tough-minded thinking. The arts powerfully nurture the ability to think in this manner.”
- Shirley Brice Heath says that “Recent reports such as SCANS 2000 link arts education directly with economic realities, asserting that young people who learn the rigors of planning and production in the arts will be valuable employees in the idea-driven workplace of the future.”
- On the postsecondary level, universities across the country continue to expand departments and majors related to the arts, design, media, and communication.

CAPITALIZING ON OREGON'S ECONOMIC CONTEXT

An arts and design small schools cadre make economic sense for Oregon, capitalizing on many statewide economic trends:

- The creative, forward-looking nature of the art and design theme aligns perfectly with the state's new marketing program: "Oregon. We love dreamers." As the state seeks to position itself as a cultural and design innovator, these arts and design schools will be producing graduates with the intellectual skills to implement the vision.
- According to a recent study by the Western States Arts Federation, "More than 400 nonprofit arts organizations around the state of Oregon contributed \$100 million in direct spending and more than \$262 million in overall impact to the state's economy in FY2000."
- The same report notes that "Oregon's broad range of cultural activities has supported rapid growth in creative services industries such as advertising, public relations, website design, filmmaking and commercial art ventures. Job growth in this sector is outpacing that of other Portland area industries by a rate of 2:1, with further strong growth on the horizon." (View the full report at www.nwbca.org/research)
- Many communities across the state have exceptional resources for the arts and design, including artist networks, organizations that promote arts education, production and appreciation, and enthusiastic art patrons. The development of cadre of dynamic small art and design schools will unify the support of these individuals and groups and create outstanding opportunities for Oregon youth to learn and succeed.